



United States Mission to the OSCE

Intervention on Tajikistan

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 22, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States too would like to express its concern over recent media developments in Tajikistan.

As the distinguished Representative of Ireland speaking on behalf of the European Union noted, an independent media plays a very important role in building democracies and in the conduct of free and fair elections. As Tajikistan prepares for parliamentary elections in 2005, it will be crucial that local media are allowed to operate freely and independently.

Several legal changes concerning the media have been introduced over the past several months. These changes effectively give the government control over the media and increase the potential for abuse and corruption.

In September 2003, the law on television and radio was revised and a special inspection body created. This body has sweeping authority over all aspects of broadcast media and can unduly influence the licensing procedure.

In December 2003, the Tajik parliament approved additional amendments to the law, including enacting "technical standards" which are financially beyond the means of most Tajik media outlets. Moreover, all production studios must now be licensed to ensure the quality of their programming – thus essentially allowing the government to also control the content of programs.

In addition, President Rahmonov issued a decree in November 2003, creating a national plan for information security. This decree contains broad provisions that could easily be abused to limit freedom of the press, particularly in the run-up to next year's elections.

We urge the Government of Tajikistan to work with the OSCE in order to ensure that its laws conform with its OSCE commitments and with international standards in this regard, and thereby to provide the right conditions for free and independent media to develop and to flourish.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.